

EMPLOYER BRANDING, SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMAGE ON YOUTH CAREER INTEREST IN THE POLICE SERVICE

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Abstract. This study examines the role of employer branding, social media exposure, and institutional image in shaping young people's career interest in the police service. The research population consisted of 7,995 final-year high school students in Palangka Raya City, with a purposive sample of 365 respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Spearman's Rho correlation, as the linearity test indicated that some variables did not meet the assumption of linearity. The findings show that all three variables are positively and significantly associated with career interest, with social media exposure emerging as the most dominant factor. This highlights the central role of digital platforms in shaping students' perceptions and career aspirations, while employer branding and institutional image remain important in enhancing organizational attractiveness and fostering public trust. The study recommends that police institutions strengthen employer branding, optimize digital communication, and consistently build a positive institutional image to increase youth interest in pursuing careers in the police service.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Social Media Exposure, Institutional Image, Career Interest, Police

1. Introduction

Demands for reform in law enforcement institutions have placed the policing profession under critical scrutiny, particularly among younger generations. Interest in pursuing a career in policing has shown a declining trend in both developed and developing countries, influenced by institutional image, youth expectations, and social media exposure in shaping public opinion. The growing critical awareness of young people regarding issues of social justice and transparency further strengthens doubts about police legitimacy, leading them to demand reforms so that law enforcement becomes fairer, non-discriminatory, and aligned with broader societal needs (Bonner, 2022).

Globally, policing continues to be regarded as a strategic career path, yet the challenge of attracting young people has become increasingly significant. A RAND study (2022) revealed that direct involvement through police academies, internships, or community-based programs can enhance career interest by providing practical experience. The Youth in Policing Initiative (YIP) in Toronto successfully attracted youth through summer programs focused on public service (Dolamore, 2022), while the Student Police Cadet Project in Kerala, India, has engaged more than 900,000 students since 2010 in discipline and civic awareness. In the United Kingdom, Volunteer Police Cadets serve as a platform for education and social participation among youth aged 13–18 (Osmólska, 2022; Mensah et al., 2023). These cases illustrate that education- and participation-based strategies are effective in building a positive image and strengthening youth interest in policing as a career.

In Indonesia, similar challenges are evident. A survey by Civil Society for Police Watch (2025) reported that public trust in the police stood at only 48.1%, with an even lower figure among

youth, at approximately 33% (Manafe, 2025). Findings from the Indonesian Survey Institute (2024) showed that only 29% of respondents aged 17–25 expressed interest in pursuing a police career, far below the 45% among those over 35. Data from the National Civil Service Agency (2023) further recorded a 12% decline in applicants for the Police Academy (Akpola) between 2020–2023. This trend is consistent with the International Labour Organization (2023), which highlighted that Southeast Asian youth increasingly prefer careers with high social value, such as technology, education, and social entrepreneurship, over law enforcement.

The characteristics of Indonesian youth reinforce these challenges. Generation Z and Generation Alpha tend to have a value-driven career orientation, choosing professions aligned with principles of justice, integrity, and social contribution (Azmy, 2020). Social media also plays a dominant role in shaping institutional perceptions. The We Are Social report (2024) indicates that 87.3% of Indonesians aged 16–24 use social media as their primary source of institutional information, including in assessing police reputation. The phenomenon of No Viral, No Justice (Jackson et al., 2025) demonstrates that public accountability often only materializes after viral pressure. Consequently, negative digital portrayals of police misconduct or abuse of authority further discourage young people from considering policing as a career path.

Moreover, increased public exposure to police violations has reinforced negative stigma toward the institution (Mensah et al., 2023; Czudnochowski & Ludewig, 2023; Wojslawowicz et al., 2023). This condition requires the police to carefully navigate their digital presence while reinforcing their commitment to transparency and public engagement (Istrate et al., 2022). On the other hand, police education curricula that have yet to adequately emphasize contemporary social issues also weaken the attractiveness of the profession (Elphick et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of declining Police Academy applications and low youth interest highlights a serious gap between institutional needs to recruit qualified cadres and the preferences of younger generations who are increasingly drawn to value-driven professions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the factors influencing youth career interest in policing, with particular attention to the roles of institutional image, social media exposure, and value-driven youth characteristics. This research is expected to expand the global literature on career choice and policing by providing a unique perspective from the Indonesian context, which is characterized by a large youth population and the highest social media penetration in Southeast Asia.

2. Literature Review

Career Interest

Career interest is understood as an individual's affective inclination toward a particular field of work that is believed to align with their abilities, values, and future expectations. The RIASEC typology theory emphasizes that interest emerges when there is congruence between the individual and the work environment (Holland, 1997). Meanwhile, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) adds that career interest is influenced by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and learning experiences that shape an individual's belief in their chosen path (Lent et al., 1994).

Nauta's (2010) study found that the congruence between personal values and the work environment is a strong predictor of career satisfaction and persistence, while Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) stressed that high self-efficacy motivates individuals to explore more challenging career options. Tracey (2002) also demonstrated that youth engagement in career exploration is positively associated with career goal clarity and decision-making readiness.

Thus, for younger generations, career interest is not only shaped by institutional information but also by learning experiences, the clarity of internalized values, and opportunities to build self-confidence in the career path they choose.

Employer Branding

Employer branding was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as a package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits offered by organizations to prospective employees. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) later expanded this concept by linking organizational brand equity with the ability to attract and retain talent. Within the framework of employer attractiveness, organizational appeal consists of functional, psychological, and symbolic benefits that candidates imagine when working for a particular institution (Berthon, 2005). Accordingly, employer branding is not merely identity communication but also a reputation strategy that shapes expectations of integrity, career development opportunities, and organizational pride, which have been shown to enhance positive perceptions and application intentions (Mosley & Schmidt, 2017).

In the public sector, including policing, employer branding plays an important role in building a professional, fair, and responsive image. Increasingly critical younger generations tend to be more interested in organizations that emphasize social missions, justice, and personal development opportunities, rather than mere job stability (Wolfswinkel et al., 2023). This highlights that for Generations Z and Alpha, employer branding that stresses integrity, transparency, and social meaning is more effective in fostering career interest in policing.

In line with this, police institutions have begun to adopt employer branding strategies to strengthen their institutional reputation and attract young people (Ananda & Santosa, 2024). This concept functions not only as a communication tool but also as a mechanism for shaping public perceptions of institutional reputation (Klimkiewicz, 2020). Although initially developed in the corporate sector, employer branding is now relevant in the public sector, including law enforcement agencies, in response to growing demands for accountability and integrity (Chandler & Nemeth, 2020).

For policing, employer branding is expected to go beyond mere image-building to embody professionalism, justice, and public service orientation. However, the gap between the ideal image constructed and the actual experiences of society often hinders the formation of positive perceptions (Drūteikienė et al., 2023; Ananda & Santosa, 2024). Negative narratives circulating on social media such as police violence, discrimination, and abuse of authority have further reinforced negative stigma, particularly among young people (Powell & Fitzpatrick, 2023).

Social Media Exposure

Social media exposure refers to the intensity and quality of individuals' engagement with digital content on online platforms, both positive and negative (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). From the perspectives of agenda-setting and framing theory, social media not only defines which issues are perceived as important but also influences how the public interprets institutions.

Several studies have shown that social media plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of policing. Paul et al. (2022) noted that the majority of the public uses Facebook as their primary source of police related information, while Mayes, (2021) emphasized that police engagement on social media enhances perceptions of transparency, albeit at the cost of greater reputational

risks. Glascock, (2023) also found that exposure to negative police-related content directly reduces young people's trust in law enforcement careers.

The Indonesian context strongly reflects this relevance. Data from We Are Social (2024) indicated that 87.3% of young people aged 16–24 use social media as their primary source of institutional information. The No Viral, No Justice phenomenon (Jackson et al., 2025) illustrates that public accountability often emerges only under viral pressure. For young people, digital narratives play a major role in shaping perceptions of policing, whether positive or negative.

The greatest challenge for police institutions is managing social media exposure to reinforce legitimacy rather than undermine reputation. Negative content regarding police violence or abuse of authority tends to spread faster than positive narratives (Mensah et al., 2023; Czudnochowski & Ludewig, 2023). Therefore, structured and consistent digital communication strategies are necessary to sustain public trust especially among younger generations and to encourage their career interest in policing.

Institutional Image

Institutional image is understood as the combination of external and internal perceptions of an organization. From a marketing perspective, image is formed by impressions, beliefs, and attitudes shaped through direct or indirect experiences (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Grönroos, 1990). From an organizational behavior perspective, the concept of construed external image highlights members' beliefs about how outsiders perceive their organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). A positive institutional image not only reinforces public legitimacy but also enhances organizational attractiveness as a career destination.

In the Indonesian context, policing faces historical challenges of an ambivalent image valued for its role in security, yet criticized for its bureaucratic opacity. Osmólska (2022) emphasized that modern and human-centered portrayals of policing have the potential to rebuild positive relationships with society and increase youth interest in joining the institution. This aligns with Gyamfi (2022), who underscored the importance of trust and active collaboration between communities and the police. Therefore, structured branding strategies and digital narrative management are crucial for building a more credible, responsive, and youth attractive institutional image.

Although previous studies have addressed career interest, employer branding, social media exposure, and institutional image separately, there remains a lack of integrative research examining these four variables in the context of youth career interest in policing. Global literature has largely emphasized the link between police legitimacy and public trust (Bonner, 2022; Crepaz, 2024), yet research directly analyzing factors that shape youth career choices in law enforcement institutions remains scarce, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia. Empirical data highlight declining youth interest in policing careers, influenced by social media exposure, negative institutional perceptions, and shifting generational preferences toward socially meaningful professions (CSPW, 2025; LSI, 2024; ILO, 2023).

Based on this gap, the present study aims to analyze the influence of institutional image, employer branding, and social media exposure on youth career interest in policing. This research is expected to contribute theoretically by expanding the literature on career choice and policing studies from a digital-generation perspective, while also offering practical insights for police institutions in formulating branding and public communication strategies to more

effectively increase youth career interest. The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

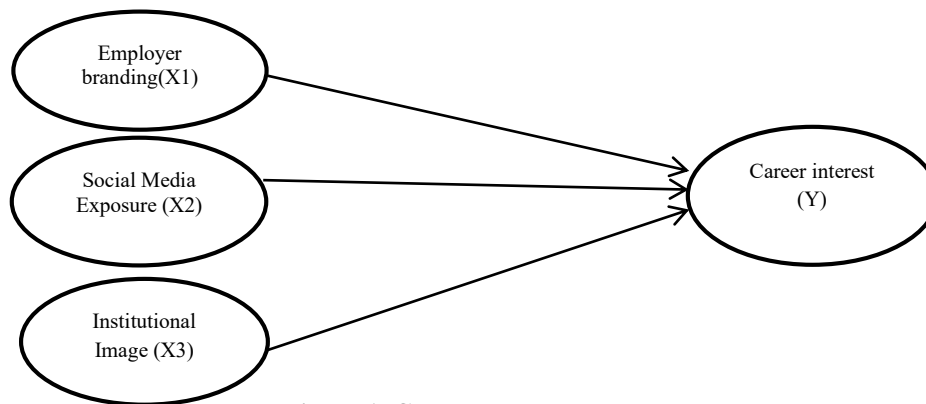


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses.

H1: Employer branding has a positive and significant effect on youths' interest in policing careers.

H2: Social-media exposure has a positive and significant effect on youths' interest in policing careers.

H3: Institutional image has a positive and significant effect on youths' interest in policing careers.

H4: Employer branding, social-media exposure, and institutional image jointly have a positive and significant effect on youths interest in policing careers

3. Method

This study applied a quantitative cross-sectional design to analyze the relationships between employer branding, social media exposure, institutional image, and career interest among youth in the police service. The population comprised 7,995 final-year high school students in Palangka Raya City, with a purposive sample of 365 respondents, determined using Krejcie's sample size table. Data were collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, covering four constructs: career interest (Lent et al., 1994), employer branding (Berthon et al., 2005), social media exposure (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), and institutional image (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). A pilot test with 35 students confirmed validity ($r < 0.361$, $\alpha = 0.05$) and reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.915$ – 0.969).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. Preliminary assumption tests included residual normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. Given that not all predictors met the linearity assumption, Spearman's Rho correlation was employed to examine the associations among variables. Results were interpreted to assess the strength, significance, and relative influence of each predictor on career interest.

4. Result and Discussion

H₁. Employer branding → career interest.

The first hypothesis posits that employer branding significantly influences youths' interest in policing careers. Multiple regression results show $\beta = 0,301$ with $p = 0.000$, indicating a positive and significant partial effect; thus H₁ is supported (see Table 1). In policing organizations, internal employer-branding efforts such as talent management programs play a

strategic role in enhancing institutional attractiveness. When police organizations present themselves as workplaces that offer social value, economic benefits, and clear pathways for development, youths' perceptions of the profession become more favorable. This finding aligns with organizational-branding theory (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), which underscores how strong employer brands heighten an institution's appeal to prospective applicants. Kim and Legendre (2021) likewise stress the importance of articulating a value proposition that resonates with candidates' aspirations, thereby improving perceived person–organization fit an especially salient issue for policing, where value alignment between the institution and the community is crucial.

Empirical studies reinforce these results. Kurek (2022) highlights that youth are more inclined toward institutions with a proactive, positive image, Nur et al. (2023) find that favorable institutional perceptions shape career decisions and Diaz & Nuño (2021) report that strong, positive branding increases organizational attractiveness among job seekers. Further, Drūteikienė et al. (2023) emphasize employer branding dimensions that bolster employee engagement such as healthy work climates which in turn support satisfaction and retention. Consistent with this, Wojslawowicz et al., (2024) argue that distinctive employer branding strategies are essential for attracting and retaining diverse, high-skill talent in policing. Integrating internal and external branding thus enhances visibility and improves youths' perceptions of policing careers.

Practically, robust employer branding matters not only for recruitment but also for retention. Simpson, (2024) notes that employer branding fosters engagement and retention both vital in high-stress, high-turnover settings like policing. More engaged personnel tend to show stronger organizational commitment, reinforcing the link between employer branding and sustained interest in policing careers.

H₂. Social-media exposure → career interest.

The second hypothesis posits that social-media exposure significantly affects youths' career interest in policing. Regression results indicate $\beta = 0,497$ with $p = 0.000$, confirming a positive, significant effect; H₂ is supported (see Table 1). Active institutional presence on social media can disseminate positive information, strengthen interaction, and build emotional proximity with potential applicants. Favorably framed content about policing has been shown to raise youths' career interest. For example, a study in Bandar Lampung on adolescents' interest in becoming female police officers (Polwan) suggests that exposure to information and relatable public figures within the police increases youths' desire to join despite limited quotas and competitive selection pointing to the importance of social-media literacy in providing credible career information and boosting confidence in career decision-making.

Wang (2023) underscores social media's role in shaping career aspirations and expanding the reach of institutional reputation. Nweke et al. (2023) similarly show that online engagement positively influences career perceptions and satisfaction. In policing contexts, social media functions not merely as a communication tool but also as a vehicle for community engagement. Ahamad, (2019) add that social platforms enable broader dissemination of institutional values and culture, tightening bonds between organizations and prospective employees. Corvite & Hui (2024) find that positive content employee testimonials, innovation highlights, and social initiatives can elevate career aspirations, while Awashreh, (2024) notes that social media improves institutional visibility and helps applicants make better informed choices.

Practical implication. Police organizations should leverage social media as a dual-purpose channel both for public communication and strategic employer branding through compelling visual content, authentic member testimonials, and clear emphasis on courage, integrity, and public service. Social outreach campaigns and sustained engagement on community issues can further strengthen positive institutional images and make policing more attractive to youth.

H₃. Institutional image → career interest.

The third hypothesis asserts that institutional image significantly influences youths' career interest in policing. Results show $\beta = 0.276$ with $p = 0.000$, indicating a positive, significant effect; H₃ is supported (see Table 1). The coefficient suggests that more positive public images correspond to greater likelihood that youths will consider policing as a viable career. This supports the view that reputation, social legitimacy, and organizational identity are central to career decision-making (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Youths tend to be more interested in institutions perceived as reputable, socially responsive, professional, and ethical (Wang, 2023).

Consistent evidence appears elsewhere. Socia et al, (2021) show that public perceptions of police credibility and trust correlate directly with intent to pursue policing. Santos et al. (2024) find that positive images related to effectiveness and integrity encourage joining, while negative images depress interest and Vermeer et al. (2020) demonstrate that transparent public communication and active engagement including via social media improve institutional image and, in turn, youths' interest. DeWitt & Gasparini (2024) report that despite competitive selection, enthusiasm to become Polwan remains high when the police are viewed positively. In short, strong positive images foster perceptions that policing is safe, credible, and offers promising development prospects.

Practical implication. Police organizations should consistently cultivate a positive image through communication strategies emphasizing transparency, accountability, and community engagement. Programs that visibly demonstrate commitment to public service social campaigns, service-quality improvements, and open interaction can strengthen legitimacy and enhance career attractiveness among youth, while also bolstering public trust in policing's role.

H₄. Joint effects and model fit.

Subsequently, in the fourth hypothesis, the findings indicate that the relationship between Employer Branding, Social Media Exposure, and Institutional Image with Career Interest was examined using Spearman's Rho correlation. The use of this non-parametric test was based on the results of the linearity test, which showed that not all independent variables had a linear relationship with the dependent variable. The results of Spearman's Rho correlation revealed that all three independent variables were positively and significantly correlated with students' Career Interest. Specifically, Employer Branding had a correlation coefficient of 0.301, Social Media Exposure 0.497, and Institutional Image 0.276, with all significance values at $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$).

These results suggest that, simultaneously, the three variables make a substantial contribution to shaping career interest. Among them, Social Media Exposure emerged as the most dominant factor, as today's students tend to obtain references, job information, and insights about the professional world primarily through digital platforms. Employer Branding remains important, particularly in creating positive perceptions of career prospects within an organization, while Institutional Image fosters students' confidence that their educational background carries added value in the labor market. Thus, the integration of corporate branding strategies, the use of

social media, and the reputation of educational institutions are crucial factors in enhancing students' career interest.

This study contributes to the literature by examining employer branding, social media exposure, and institutional image as predictors of career interest in the context of police institutions setting that remains underexplored in organizational branding research. The findings confirm that career interest is not only shaped by internal factors of the individual but also by external factors such as reputation, information exposure, and institutional image. Among the three tested variables, social media exposure emerged as the most influential, highlighting the importance of digital communication strategies in supporting recruitment effectiveness and strengthening the legitimacy of public institutions such as the police.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, only three independent variables were examined, while other relevant factors such as intrinsic motivation, family support, work environment, and economic conditions were not included in the model. Second, the research employed cross-sectional data collected at a single point in time, which limits its ability to capture the dynamics of career interest over time. Third, the use of a quantitative questionnaire instrument makes respondents' answers highly dependent on subjective perceptions, which may not fully reflect actual conditions.

To address these limitations, future research is recommended to adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain deeper insights. Incorporating mediating or moderating variables, such as intrinsic motivation or social support, would further enrich the analysis. In addition, expanding the sample across different regions would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Future studies may also involve collaboration with relevant institutions or organizations to design more effective strategies for promotion, digital communication, and employer branding, thereby ensuring that the results provide greater contributions both academically and practically.

Table 1. Spearman's Rho Correlation Test Analysis Results

Variables	Standardized Coefficients	p	Ket
Employer Branding- Career Interests	0,301	.000 (p<0,05)	significant
Social Media Expose- Career Interests	0,497	.000 (p<0,05)	significant
Institutional Image- Career Interests	0,276	.000 (p<0,05)	significant

Source: SPSS Version 25 Output

5. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that employer branding, social media exposure, and institutional image are positively and significantly associated with young people's career interest in the context of police institutions. Using Spearman's Rho correlation, the findings reveal that social media exposure is the most dominant factor, highlighting the critical role of digital communication in shaping career aspirations. These results confirm that career interest is not solely determined by internal factors, but is also strongly influenced by external elements such as organizational reputation, information exposure, and institutional image.

Theoretically, this study extends the employer branding literature, which has predominantly focused on the corporate sector, by situating it within the context of public organizations,

particularly law enforcement. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening employer branding, optimizing digital communication through social media, and consistently building a positive institutional image as key strategies to attract younger generations to careers in the police force.

The study suggests that developing a strong institutional image and managing digital communication strategically is no longer optional but a necessity in facing shifting generational preferences and increasing global competition. Thus, this research contributes not only to the academic discourse on organizational branding in the public sector but also provides actionable recommendations for police institutions and other public organizations to appear more authentic, adaptive, and responsive in building an inclusive and sustainable career ecosystem

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